

Browne, Matilda, 1869 - 1947

The Herd Coming Home, circa 1915

Signed “Matilda Browne” lower right

oil on canvas

20” x 32”

Most profiles of Matilda Browne as an artist open with two oft-repeated facts—that Browne was the only female member of the Old Lyme Art Colony to be invited to paint one of the celebrated door panels in the Griswold mansion, and that “she was the only woman to be immortalized in Henry Rankin Poore’s overmantle, ‘The Fox Chase,’ the lively caricature of twenty-three Old Lyme artists engaged in an imaginary hunt that has come to symbolize the colony’s spirit-de-corps” (MacAdam). Though her professional associations reached well beyond Old Lyme—she spent the majority of her career in New York and Greenwich—it was her connection to the impressionist colony in Old Lyme that established Browne as a member of the group responsible for shifting the landscape of American art.

Browne was born in Newark, New Jersey, and had the good fortune to grow up in a house next door to famed landscape painter, Thomas Moran (1837-1926). As recounted in Helen Comstock’s contemporary profile of Browne for *International Studio*, Moran tolerated a precocious Browne hanging about his studio as he worked (Comstock). Later, as Browne showed sufficient interest and ability, he allowed her to experiment with his own brushes and colors. Evidence of her intrinsic talent was readily apparent. She exhibited one of her early efforts, a floral study, at the National Academy of Design when she was only twelve years old.

After Moran, Browne studied under a series of accomplished tutors—Eleanor and Kate Greatorex (1854-1917, 1851-1913), Frederick Freer (1849-1908), Charles Melville Dewey (1849-1937), Julian Dupré (1851-1910) in Barbizon, Henry Bisbing (1849-1933) in Holland, and, perhaps most significantly given her fondness for animal painting, Carleton Wiggins (1848-1932). As her art career accelerated, the number of accolades she received increased. MacAdam writes: “In 1899, she won the Dodge Prize at the National Academy of Design, and in 1901, the third Hallgarten Prize. She also won awards from the Connecticut Academy of Fine Arts in 1918 and 1919, and later from the Greenwich Art Association. In addition, her works were included in the exhibitions of the American Water Color Society, the Society of Animal Painters and Sculptors, and the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors, of which she was a founder” (MacAdam).

With *The Herd Coming Home*, circa 1915, Browne’s training as an animal painter and accomplished artist is evident in the sensitive handling of the cattle within an agrarian landscape. The vigorous brushwork and the activity of the scene defy two-dimensionality and invite interaction from the spectator. The panoramic landscape implies an extension beyond the edges of the canvas, and the herd of cattle is moments away from entering the viewer’s space. A highly tonal palette is enhanced by loose brushwork and sporadic bursts of color, creating an aesthetically pleasing and complimenting contrast of Impressionism and Tonalism, the two most important styles for Old Lyme artists at the turn of the century.

Provenance: From a private collection to the gallery.

Exhibitions:

American Watercolor Society

Art Institute of Chicago

Boston Art Club

Chicago 1893 Columbian Exhibition

Corcoran Gallery

Louisiana Purchase Expo, 1904
National Academy of Design
National Association Women Artists
Paris Salon
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts
St. Louis Exposition, World's Fair 1904

Bibliography:

Barbara MacAdam, "Biographies of the Artists," in *Old Lyme: the American Barbizon* (Old Lyme: Lyme Historical Society, Florence Griswold Museum, 1982), 35.

Helen Comstock, "A Woman Animal Painter," in *International Studio* (November, 1923), 129.